

A Love Story Part 2

by Margaret Drury Gane

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In which Betty Kennedy, having lost her husband of 28 years, remarries and becomes the mistress of Limestone Hall

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COLONEL G. Allan Burton's regiment, of which he's fiercely proud, is the Governor-General's Horse Guards. His stores, begun in 1872 by a hopeful Scot named Robert Simpson, are found in Canadian cities from coast to coast. His 13-room Georgian mansion, Limestone Hall Farms, sits on 400 acres half an hour from Toronto. He prefers it to his Toronto apartment and to the luxurious Lake Rosseau home he recently sold to his nephew.

Everything about Limestone Hall has the relaxed and certain scent of old Ontario wealth. It was built in 1853 of stone and wood from the property itself. Geese skim the natural pond. Guests can swim in the pool, ride one of Burton's thoroughbreds, or amble about the grounds. Burton grows orchids in the greenhouse, and hosts dinners he prefers to keep to eight friends. He likes to shoot; he fishes for salmon in New Brunswick, for trout in Pennsylvania. His name can be found in Peter Newman's book, *The Canadian Establishment*. In all probability he would have maintained his opulently low profile had he married someone less visible than Betty Kennedy.

Had Betty Kennedy followed her own feelings about fame — keep what's private private — her becoming Betty Kennedy Burton, mistress of a mansion, would not have become news last fall. It was news that might have made her a guest — if she weren't already a panelist — on CBC's "Front Page Challenge." For 15 years she has been best known as the well-dressed lady of uncontroversial competence who buffers Gordon Sinclair's insolence and Pierre Berton's tough probing. She also has a daily, hour-long radio interview show on Toronto's powerful CFRB. Betty Kennedy, a no-nonsense woman, controlled and wholesome, smoothes things over. She doesn't shake them up.

When her husband died of cancer, in December 1975, she broke her rule. She wrote an intimate and candid 71-page tribute called *Gerhard: A Love Story* that quickly became the Macmillan publishing company's second best seller behind John Diefenbaker's memoirs.

Here was Betty Kennedy describing her brief brush with suicide, printing passionate love notes and exposing anguish and triumph with an abandon even close friends didn't know she had.

Her grief had gone public, and Betty Kennedy had delivered the first stage of what Paula Quigley, CFRB's promotion

director, calls "a surprising double whammy to the public."

What made her controversial for the first time in her life was the second part of the double whammy. While the public was still sympathizing and buying her book in great numbers, Betty Kennedy married Colonel G. Allan Burton, a long-time friend whose wife had died of cancer only one week before Gerhard. The wedding ceremony took place 10 months later, in October last year. It was small, private and quiet, unlike the two months of rumor, disbelief and denials that preceded it, two months that still mystify Betty Kennedy.

"The interest frankly surprised me," she says with a trace of annoyance. "I think that you can only marry someone you love, that's the only basis for marrying. I don't know how you can explain those things. I'm not sure they are explainable."

Kennedy has never shunned publicity but she has always orchestrated it along the lines that suited her. Paula Quigley feels that Kennedy decided years ago to keep her public and personal life absolutely separate, revealing little beyond a stereotype image of the wife-mother-public personality. "Betty herself controls that image very, very carefully," says Quigley. "And it hasn't helped that most of her publicity looked as if it was turned out by a cookie cutter." For years, the cookie cutter has frustrated journalists and produced articles with titles like "Nice Girls Finish First," laid out with pictures reminiscent of expatriated royalty.

Throughout the elegant rooms of Limestone Hall, Betty Kennedy has arranged dozens of scarlet and yellow tulips, an act of determined optimism that makes a mock spring of February. She is saying that she likes a man who knows who he is. Allan Burton fits the description. In riding breeches and boots, Burton is off for a Saturday morning canter. He's been wealthy so long that it is simply a fact of life to be enjoyed. He seems entirely at ease with himself and people around him, which cannot be said of Betty Kennedy as she collects cigarettes and coffee and seats herself on a rose-pink sofa for the interview.

She has a knack of turning questions and her responses into print in her own mind, weighing the outcome with such care that any spontaneity collapses. Instead of pointing up the sensitive and warm pursuit it was, her recounting of Burton's courtship is at first dry.

"I had met him in business circles before — I can't pinpoint the time, but it was probably at one of the board meetings. [Both Kennedy and Burton are on the boards of Standard Broadcasting and Simpsons, Limited.] There were some social events too, over a period of a couple of years, directors' dinners and so on. Though Gerhard and I had had Allan and his wife to our place for dinner, we'd never been to his place, for a variety of

reasons. So I didn't know Allan well — I saw him in a business context. I only became aware of him in a different way when his wife was ill and dying, and my husband was ill and dying. Both of us knew what the other was going through."

The tragic parallel drew them together, as families at first, then more personally. It wasn't a mad falling in love, says a close friend. Kennedy says, "He'd called with invitations to dinner, but I was never able to go. Then on Valentine's Day there was a lovely bouquet of roses. I was very touched by that. Here was someone who knew there wouldn't be flowers this year." Burton had Betty and her daughter, Tracy, out to the farm, and invited Kennedy to dinner alone. "I think we'd only been out to dinner three or four times, really. It wasn't a long courtship."

Almost no one beyond her confidant and secretary at CFRB, Irene Wilson, knew of the relationship. In June, Kennedy

invited Don Hartford, CFRB's president, to lunch at the Granite Club and told him of her plans to marry Burton. "Her family knew, of course," says Hartford, "but they'd decided to keep it quiet for a while. They weren't sure how people would take the news so soon after Gerhard's death."

The secret was well kept until early August. Gordon Sinclair, reading late in bed one sticky Muskoka night, had a visitor, an old friend who'd come from a party where the only talk had been that Kennedy was married to Burton. "Someone had seen them at his big place on Lake Rosseau and assumed they were married," Sinclair says. It wasn't long before CFRB began receiving telephone calls wanting to know if all the rumors were true. Paula Quigley, who perhaps should have been the first to know, finally decided to ask Betty Kennedy herself. "She said, 'Good heavens, where would they get an idea like that?' and I just accepted that as her

Illustration by John Dawson



Margaret Drury Gane is a contributing editor of Weekend.



denial. Anyway, I was giving out these firm *no's* when the announcement was suddenly made in the papers, which didn't make me feel too happy. Betty apologized later by explaining that she really didn't think anybody cared."

The station's switchboard had lit up for hours. Some people said they were burning the book, that they'd been ripped off. A few were supportive but, as Quigley points out, "a lot of people felt let down because there's obviously a big gap between the private woman and her public image."

Not even Gordon Sinclair, Kennedy's friend and longtime colleague on "Front Page Challenge," believed the news when he first heard it, though he's quick to point out that in a sense he predicted it. "Look," he rasps, as bluntly honest as ever, the landslide face creasing pleasantly at his clairvoyance. "I'd read Betty's manuscript before she sent it back to the publisher's and I told her I absolutely and totally

objected to the business of the one tombstone with both her name and Gerhard's carved in it. I knew then she was too alive and young to be able to read that far into the future." Sinclair was baffled a little by the secrecy that surrounded the relationship and urged the couple to go public. Other people at CFRB, however, claim that Kennedy's somewhat aloof manner was hardly out of character.

Says one staffer, "I just can't relate the woman with the warm voice over the microphone, and that starry-eyed book, to the person who works here everyday." A young newsroom reporter, Valerie Pringle, says Kennedy "just isn't the sort of person anybody gets to know well." Polite and caring if she knows someone is in trouble, she still has an air of withdrawal, as if letting go were a weakness, intimacy a danger to be warded off with correct courtesy. Except for the weeks after her husband's death, few people saw much

indication of human vulnerability. Steely self-discipline had carried her through the daily radio show and tapings of "Front Page Challenge," but she was breaking down regularly in her office and at home. It was this, not the sensitivity of her book's subject matter, that kept Kennedy from doing interviews to publicize it. Following her marriage, however, she quickly reverted to the old image, says Paula Quigley. "All that openness closed over."

Since the marriage, Kennedy has been chauffeur-driven to work. Her arrival drew the predictable response: "Here comes CFRB's Barbara Walters in her silver Grenada Ghia." It wasn't meant nastily but even that sample of her sudden upward mobility wouldn't have been criticized if Kennedy didn't seem to some so staunchly Mary-Poppins perfect, controlling her press and her grief. "It was," says Quigley, "a relief to see her cry at the funeral."

The allegation that she carries her control too far mystifies her family, who find her warm and giving. "When people tell me Betty's cold, I just can't believe it's the same person I know," says her stepdaughter. And certainly Betty Kennedy sees herself differently. "You're using a word I just don't find applicable. I don't think of myself as that controlled." The trouble is that she says this, and almost everything else, in the same carefully chiselled phrases her audiences have come to expect. And that is why the publication of *Gerhard: A Love Story* stunned so many of her followers. The act simply didn't fit the person. It's likely that Kennedy still hasn't accepted the fact that what really attracted the readers was the book's revelation of her as a sensitive, suffering human being.

Of course, that isn't the Betty Kennedy that has attracted such a large audience over 17 years at CFRB, a following that includes the people she interviews. "There's a waiting list," says one staffer, "because they know she's objective, she won't put them on the spot." On a recent trip to Toronto, Pierre Trudeau, not noted for his love of interviewers, had his aide call asking to be on her show. At CFRB, a station whose right-of-centre conservatism provides a comfortable setting for her, Betty Kennedy is as much a star as anyone in Canada gets to be, although the coveted ACTRA award, the Nelly, has alluded her three times. Last year, as she appeared without Gerhard for the first time at the televised presentations, her staff was almost afraid she'd get it as a sentimental favorite. "That would be for all the wrong reasons," says Quigley. "The right reason would be for her competence, which is considerable."

Although Kennedy won't reveal her several incomes, Gordon Sinclair has no reservations about taking an educated guess. "I'd say she got somewhere around \$35,000 with the station, and \$25,000 with 'Front Page Challenge.'" Then there are directorates on four boards (Burton is on seven), all paying unrevealed but healthy stipends: the Bank of Montreal, whose twin, scarlet-bound histories are by her desk, Standard Broadcasting, Simpsons, and an American-based corporation named Akzona, Inc.

Surrounded by the solidarity of Lime-stone Hall, Betty Kennedy says her life has not changed significantly — "It's just busier." But there are differences. She's cut back sharply on public appearances. In time, says Gordon Sinclair, when "Front Page Challenge" leaves the air, she will probably use her public image to jolt some life into any sagging Simpsons stores across the land.

At 51, Betty Kennedy sits almost sedately on the rose-pink sofa, among the antiques and spring flowers. There seem so few problems in her life now that a gloss of improbability settles over the living room. There is no hint of the outspoken and intensely human lady of the book, who revealed for such a brief time a less stilted persona. Perhaps, as friends and family say, she saves herself for the family. Now, as she waits for the bustle of two yapping dogs to tell her the family is back from riding, she seems more relaxed. The questions are done and she has managed to reveal little. ◀